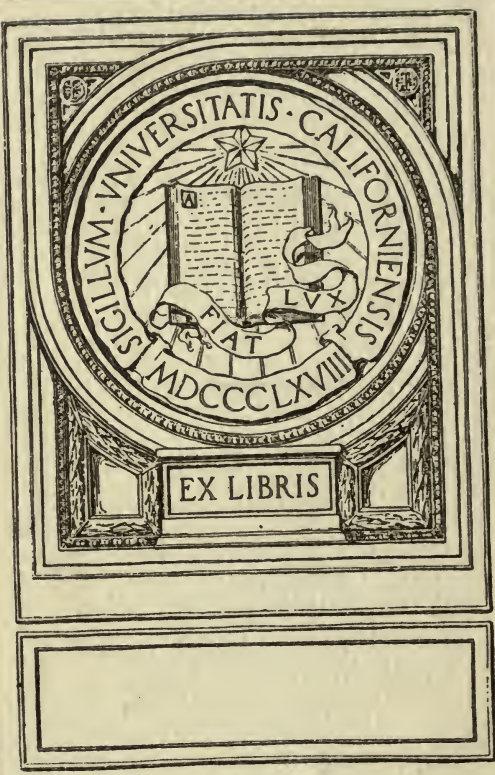




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CHARLES KINGSLEY

A SERMON

PREACHED IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY

ON JANUARY 31, 1875

BEING THE SUNDAY AFTER THE BURIAL AT EVERSLEY

OF

CHARLES KINGSLEY

CANON OF WESTMINSTER

BY

ARTHUR PENRHYN STANLEY

DEAN OF WESTMINSTER

THIRD EDITION

London

MACMILLAN AND CO.

1875

After dinner

July 1897

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S E R M O N .

*‘ Watch ye ; stand fast in the faith ; quit you like men,
and be strong.’—1 CORINTHIANS xvi. 13.*

IT was once remarked to me by a venerable and saintly person—the late Thomas Erskine, of Linlathen—that one of the most striking characteristics of the Psalms was their free, unrestrained appreciation of what we call nature, whether in the moral or the physical world ; that they begin with commending the honest, upright man—‘ the noblest work of God ’—and they end by calling on every creature, animate or inanimate, to praise the Eternal. This sympathy with the natural man and the natural creation is the more remarkable in the Psalter, because, of all the sacred books of the Old Testament, it is the one which is confessedly the most spiritual, the most intimate in its communion with the Divine. And we learn from this, as from many like characteristics of the Bible, that the modern distinction drawn, from the Middle Ages downward, between nature and grace, between the secular and the spiritual, between the Church and the world—however difficult it may be altogether to avoid such phrases—is not an essential

part of the Christian religion, and in no way corresponds to the opposition drawn in the Scriptures between the flesh and the spirit, between the holy and the unholy—is the product of an artificial condition, whether of barbarous or civilised society, which has stunted rather than forwarded the upward growth of the spirit of man towards its Divine original. To these artificial separations the mass of mankind readily accommodate themselves; it is more easy for the worldly to be entirely worldly, and for the religious to be exclusively religious, each in the isolated mediocrity, whether we call it golden or leaden, which tends to produce a false standard of religion and a low estimate of the sphere in which our duties are cast. But it is for this reason that we ought to prize as among God's best gifts any characters, any phenomena, that break through this commonplace level, like mountain crags, and countersect and unite the ordinary divisions of mankind, or, like volcanoes, burst forth at times, and reveal to us something of the central fires within and underneath the crust of custom, fashion, and tradition. Such are those whom we sometimes see, who appear to cynical critics or to superstitious formalists to have chosen a position in life apparently alien to the bent of their inclinations or their antecedents—a religious man, for example, becoming a lawyer or a statesman—a bold, gallant youth, born to be a sailor or a soldier, and yet led by circumstances into the career of a clergyman. Such, also, are those in whom the inborn flame of genius illuminates, or, perhaps, shatters the earthly vessel which contains it, and, despite of all surrounding obstacles, claims

affinity with kindred sparks of light and warmth, wherever they exist.

We all know what and who it is that suggests these thoughts. In that multiplied shadow of sorrow and death which has for the last few months and weeks enlarged its borders beyond usual precedent throughout the land, one brilliant light which shone in our dim atmosphere has been suddenly extinguished; and it cannot be allowed thus to pass away without asking ourselves what we have gained by its brief presence amongst us—what we have lost by its disappearance. Others have spoken, and will long speak, on both sides of the Atlantic, of the literary fame of the gifted poet whose dust might well have been mingled with the dust of his brother poets in these walls. Others will speak, in nearer circles, of the close affection which bound the pastor to his flock, and the friend to his friends, and the father to the children, and the husband to the wife, in that romantic home which is now for ever identified with his name, and beside which he rests, beneath the yews which he planted with his own hands, and the giant fir trees that fold their protecting arms above. But that which alone is fitting to urge from this place is the moral and religious significance of the remarkable career which has left a spot void, as if where a rare plant has grown, which no art can reproduce, but of which the peculiar fragrance still lingers with those who have ever come within its reach. To the vast congregations which hung upon his lips in this church—to the wide world which looked eagerly for the utterances that no more will come from that burning spirit—to the loving friends

who mourn for the sudden extinction of a heart of fire, for the sudden relaxation of the grasp of a hand of iron—I would fain recall some of those higher strains which, amidst manifold imperfections, acknowledged by none more freely than by himself, placed him unquestionably amongst the conspicuous teachers of his age, and gave to his voice the power of reaching souls to which other preachers and teachers addressed themselves in vain.

It has seemed to me that there were three main lessons of his character and career, which may be summed up in the three parts of the Apostolic farewell, which I have chosen for my text—‘Watch ye; quit you like men, and be strong; stand fast in the Faith.’

1. Watch—that is, ‘be awake, be wakeful’; have yours eyes open—the eyes of your senses, the eyes of your mind, the eyes of your conscience.

Such was the wakefulness, such the vigilance, such the devouring curiosity of him whose life and conversation, as he walked amongst ordinary men, was often as of a waker amongst drowsy sleepers—as a watchful sentinel in advance of a slumbering host. The diversity of human character—the tragedies of human life—were always as to him an ever opening, unfolding book. But perhaps even more than to the glories and the wonders of man, he was—far beyond what falls to the lot of most—alive and awake in every pore to the beauty, the marvels of nature. That contrast in the old story of ‘Eyes’ and ‘No Eyes’ was the contrast between him and common men. That eagle eye seemed to discern every shade and form of animal and vegetable life. That listening ear, like that of the hero

in the fairy tale, seemed almost to catch the growing of the grass and the opening of the shell. Nature to him was a companion, speaking with a thousand voices. And nature was to him also the voice of God, the face of the Eternal and Invisible, as it can only be to those who study and love and know it. For his was no idle dreamer's pleasure—it was a wakefulness not only to the force and beauty of the outward world, but to the causes of its mysterious operations, to the explanations given by its patient students and explorers. Rarely, if ever, did he join in the headlong condemnation—never in the cowardly fear—of science and scientific men. They seemed to be fellow-workers with himself, and he with them. From his noble confidence in the results of physical research take comfort, O ye of little faith; open wide your eyes and ears to every breathing of the Divine Spirit, to every accent of the Divine Truth. To you, as to him, let everything that hath breath praise the Eternal God. Children gathering shells on the sea-shore—fishermen by chalk streams—huntsmen on the bright days of autumn and of winter—watchers of the secret growth of plant and insect, and penetrating stream and shifting soil—fear not to learn and to teach those lessons of holy and innocent enjoyment which awakened in him the constant praise of the Eternal Cause—‘for His name only is excellent, and His power above heaven and earth.’

When he spoke in his sermons of the ‘cedars of God,’ or, ‘of the lions roaring after their meat from God’—when he spoke in his romance of the tropical skies and forests, which ‘at last’ he saw with the bodily eye, long after he had described them with the imagination of

the poet—who does not feel that the contemplation of those wonderful works of God became, as it were, part of the framework and groundwork of his religion, and may, in a measure, become part of ours also?

Who that has heard him speak of the *Benedicite*, the Song of the Three Children, can hear it again without feeling in it that sanctification of science which drew from him such reiterated cries of admiration—regarding it as he did, apocryphal though it be, as the very crown and flower of the Old Testament—the invocation of Nature to bear witness against the idolatry of nature?—‘O ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord: praise Him and magnify Him for ever.’

Who, again, can fail to derive a sense of grim consolation—nay, more, of Christian philosophy—as he encounters, even in the bitter, biting blast of our sharp English winter, or yet sharper spring, that moral lesson, that living sermon, breathed into it by those exulting lines which will hardly grow old as long as the east wind blows and the English nation lasts?—

Welcome, black North-easter,
 O'er the German foam—
 O'er the Danish moorlands,
 From thy frozen home!
 Come, as came our fathers,
 Heralded by thee,
 Conquering, from the eastward,
 Lords by land and sea;
 Come, and strong within us
 Stir the Vikings' blood,
 Bracing nerve and sinew—
 Blow, thou wind of God!

2. This leads me to the second part of the Apostolic maxim—‘Quit you like men, and be strong,’

Ἀνδρίζεσθε καὶ κραταιοῦσθε. Surely, if there was any one of our time with whom this precept was associated, even to exaggeration, it was with him who is gone. That famous phrase which he indeed repudiated for himself, but which became inextricably attached to his name, was but the Apostle's word in modern form. No doubt the Bible overflows with sympathy for the sorrowful, the suffering, the feeble; but it is also full of heart-stirring commands 'to play the man'—'to be men in understanding,' 'to quit us like men,' and 'be strong and very courageous.' Christianity, if it is to hold its own and be what it claims to be, must be not only gentle, feminine, and sweet, but masculine, muscular, and strong. But, in fact, the two sides thus represented in the Bible, and certainly as exemplified in him, were not inconsistent; rather in their best form they are inseparable. No one was more chivalrously respectful towards women—more tender to the weak and suffering. Of all his songs, of all his utterances, that which will live the longest in the mouths of men is that which is full, not of the fierce spirit of the Sea-kings, but of the wailing and weeping cry of simple human pathos—

O Mary, go and call the cattle home,
And call the cattle home,
Across the sands of Dee.

Even in his rude conflict with the superstitions of mediæval times half his force was derived from his kindly appreciation of their nobler side. The 'Saint's Tragedy' would have been to him no tragedy had he not fully recognised that Elizabeth of Thuringia was indeed a true Christian saint. And this gave yet more

strength to the determined stand which he made, in what he deemed an effeminate age, for the vigorous, courageous, straight-forward aspect of true religion—the sense that justice and truth and courage were as essentially saint-like as tenderness, beneficence, and devotion.

It was this which roused his chivalrous defence in his earlier life of those whom, perhaps in excess, he thought oppressed and neglected. It was this which roused his chivalrous defence in his later life of those whom, also perhaps in excess, he regarded as sacrificed to popular prejudice. It was this profound feeling of the rights of the poor and duties of the rich that kindled the fiery pages of ‘*Alton Locke*’ and of ‘*Yeast*.’

It was this just impatience of a sickly sentimental theology which denounced alike the monk of the 13th century and the fanatical preacher of the 19th. It was this moral enthusiasm which, in the pages of ‘*Hypatia*,’ has scathed with an everlasting brand the name of the Alexandrian Cyril and his followers, for their outrages on humanity and morality in the name of a hollow Christianity and a spurious orthodoxy. Read, if you would learn some of the most impressive lessons of ecclesiastical history—read and inwardly digest those pages, perhaps the most powerful that he ever wrote, which close that wonderful story by discriminating the destinies which awaited each of its characters as they passed, one after another, ‘each to his own place.’

It was this righteous indignation against what seemed to him the glorification of a tortuous and ambi-

guous policy, which betrayed him into the only personal controversy in which he was ever entangled, and in which, matched in unequal conflict with the most subtle and dexterous controversialist of modern times, it is not surprising that for the moment he was apparently worsted, whatever we may think of the ultimate issues that were raised in the struggle, and whatever may be the total results of our experiences, before and after, on the main question over which the combat was fought—on the relation of the human conscience to Truth or to authority.

It was this passion for gallant deeds and adventurous daring that created the characters of Lancelot and Thurnall and Amyas Leigh, that revived the heroes of Greece for the young, and the heroes of the Elizabethan age for the old.

And it was this sense that he was a thorough Englishman—one of yourselves, working, toiling, feeling with you and like you—that endeared him to you, O artisans and working men of London—to you, O rising youth of England. You know how he desired with a passionate desire that you should have pure air, pure water, habitable dwellings—that you should be able to share the courtesies, the refinements, the elevation of citizens and of Englishmen; and you may therefore trust him the more when he told you from the pulpit, and still tells you from the grave, that your homes and your lives should be no less full of moral purity and light, that vice and idleness, meanness and dishonesty, are base, contemptible, and miserable. It is for this that he speaks to you with especial force, you whom he would have called the sons

of Esau—the frank, the generous, the self-forgetful; and bids you rise to higher spiritual spheres. It is for this, also, that the religious world, the orthodox world, the sons of the believing but yet timid, wily Jacob, ought to feel that in his presence they had the best, because the most severe, of monitors—that in his departure they have lost the most faithful of friends because the severest of critics.

Quit you like men, and be strong—strong against your vices as well as your weaknesses—strong in body and strong in understanding—strong in spirit.

As he lay, the other day, cold in death, like the stone effigy of an ancient warrior, the ‘fitful fever’ of life gone, the strength of immortality left, resting as if after the toils of a hundred battles, this was himself idealised. From those mute lips there seemed to issue once more the living words with which he spoke ten years ago, before one who honoured him with an unswerving faithfulness even to the end. ‘Some say’—thus he spoke in the chapel of Windsor Castle—‘some say that ‘the age of chivalry is past, that the spirit of romance ‘is dead. The age of chivalry is never past, so long ‘as there is a wrong left unredressed on earth, or a man ‘or woman left to say, “I will redress that wrong, or ‘spend my life in the attempt.” The age of chivalry ‘is never past, so long as we have faith enough to say, ‘“God will help me to redress that wrong, or if not me, ‘He will help those that come after me, for His eternal Will is to overcome evil with good.” The spirit of romance will never die, as long as there is a man left to see that the world might and can be better, happier, wiser, fairer in all things than it is now. The spirit of

‘romance will never die, as long as a man has faith in God to believe that the world will eventually be better and fairer than it is now; as long as we have faith, however weak, to believe in the romance of all romances, the wonder of all wonders, in that wonder of which poets have dreamed, and prophets and Apostles have told, each according to his light—that the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord—that nation shall no more rise in war against nation—that wonder which our Lord Himself bade us pray for, as for our daily bread, and say, “Father, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”’

3. And this leads me to that clause in the Apostle’s warning which I have kept for the last—‘Stand fast in the faith.’ I have hitherto spoken of our lost friend in his natural, God-given genius, not in his professional or pastoral functions. He was what he was, not by virtue of his office, but by virtue of what God had made him in himself. He was, we might almost say, a layman in the guise or disguise, and sometimes hardly in the guise, of a clergyman—fishing with the fishermen, hunting with the huntsmen, able to hold his own in tent and camp, with courtier or with soldier; an example that a genial companion may be a Christian gentleman—that a Christian clergyman need not be a member of a separate caste, and a stranger to the common interests of his countrymen. Yet human, genial, layman as he was, he still was not the less—nay, he was ten times more—a pastor than he would have been had he shut himself out from the haunts and walks of men. He was sent by Providence, as it were, ‘far off to the Gentiles’—far off, not to other

lands or other races of mankind, but far off from the usual sphere of minister or priest, 'to fresh woods and pastures new,' to find fresh worlds of thought and wild tracts of character, in which he found a response to himself, because he gave a response to them. Witness the unknown friends that from far or near sought the wise guidance of the unknown counsellor, who declared to them the unknown God after whom they were seeking if haply they might find Him. Witness the tears of the rough peasants of Hampshire, as they crowded round the open grave, to look for the last time on the friend of thirty years, with whom were mingled the passing hunter in his red coat and the wild gipsy wanderers, mourning for the face that they should no more see in forest or on heath. Witness the grief which fills the old cathedral town of my own native county and of the native county of his ancestors, beside the sands of his own Dee, for the recollection of the energy with which he there gathered the youth of Chester round him for teachings of science or religion. Witness the grief which has overcast this venerable church, which in two short years he had made his own, and in which all felt that he had found a place worthy of himself, and that in him the place had found an occupant worthy to fill it. In these days of rebuke and faintheartedness, when so many gifted spirits shrink from embarking on one of the noblest, because the most sacred, of all professions, it ought to be an encouragement to be reminded that this fierce poet and masculine reformer deemed his energies not misspent in the high yet humble vocation of an English clergyman—that, however much at times

suspected, avoided, rebuffed, he yet, like others who have gone before him, at last won from his brethren the willing tribute of honour and love, which once had been sturdily refused or grudgingly granted.

Scholar, poet, novelist, he yet felt himself to be, with all and before all, a spiritual teacher and guide.

We do not claim for him, what he never claimed for himself, the character of a profound theologian. For the disentanglement of the historical growth of Christian doctrine, so indispensable to the right understanding of its language and its meaning—for the critical researches which have in our time endeavoured to trace back to their remote origin the sacred books, and have given new life to their history, philosophy, and poetry—he had little inclination, and perhaps rendered scant justice to those who ventured on that arduous but necessary service of Divine truth, opening the horizon and clearing the path for all who would enter on the sacred ministry of the Word of God, even as the scientific discoveries in which he himself so much delighted did the same for the Works of God.

One fatherly friend and counsellor he followed closely, and felt that to him he owed his own self, and would sometimes playfully say that it was enough for him to be to the outside world the interpreter of Frederick Maurice. But with or without that inspiring influence, it was still a noble pastoral function that, amidst all the wavering inconstancy of our time, he called upon the men of his generation, with a steadfastness and assured conviction that of itself steadied and reassured the minds of those for whom he spoke, ‘to stand fast in the faith.’ ‘In the faith.’ On what special form of

the Christian faith did he most insist? In what special fastness and fortress of the ancient Catholic faith of former times, or of our own English Protestant faith, did he plant his foot with this undoubting firmness? Doubtless for him, as for many, the old walls seemed sufficient for the coming strife, and he cared not to repair their breaches; the old vessels seemed to him strong enough to contain the new wine, and he cared not to make new vehicles even for the fermentation of the 'yeast' which he himself had stirred. But still there were two main doctrines—old as eternity, yet for ever needing to be renewed with each age of the world—which he held with a fervour and tenacity all his own, with a freshness and a vigour that amounted almost to the originality of genius—which, in his teaching, enlightened and controlled and coloured even the most antique and the most trite of the ordinary teachings of past or present times.

One of these fixed, paramount, over-ruling persuasions was the belief—often forgotten, often derided, sometimes even severely discountenanced—that the main part of the religion of mankind and of Christendom should consist in the strict fulfilment of the duty of man, which is the will of God. Alike in the Old Testament and in the New, he delighted to bring together the golden passages which exalt the law, the statutes, the testimonies, the commandments of God; and he set forth their ancient meaning, for our modern days, in his own plain, strong English words, which none can mistake or forget, and which have the rare merit of being perfectly intelligible and perfectly true.

Nothing can be a substitute for purity or virtue.

‘Man will always try to find a substitute for it. But
‘let no man lay any such flattering unction to his soul.
‘The first and last business of every living being, what-
‘ever be his station, party, creed, tastes, duties, is
‘Morality. Virtue, virtue, always virtue! Nothing
‘that man ever invents will absolve him from the uni-
‘versal necessity of being good as God is good, righteous
‘as God is righteous, and holy as God is holy.’

And this leads me to the other doctrine, which also shall be stated in his own words, as we heard him from this place, when he delivered his farewell sermon before starting for the American continent, in conclusion of that brilliant and solemn course to which, Sunday after Sunday, the eager multitudes came to hear the new preacher of our Abbey.

‘And now,’ he said, ‘now friends, and almost all
‘friends unknown—and alas! never to be known by
‘me—you who are to me as people floating down a
‘river, while I, the preacher, stand upon the bank and
‘call, in hope that some of you may catch some word
‘of mine ere the great stream shall bear you out of
‘sight—oh catch, at least, catch this one word—the last
‘which I shall speak here for many months, and which
‘sums up all which I have been trying to say to you of
‘late. Fix in your minds, or rather ask God to fix in
‘your minds, this one idea of an absolutely good God;
‘good with all forms of goodness which you respect
‘and love in man; good as you, and I, and every
‘honest man, understand the plain word good. Slowly
‘you will acquire that grand and all-illuminating idea;
‘slowly and most imperfectly at best; for who is
‘mortal man that he should conceive and comprehend

‘the goodness of the infinitely good God? But see, then, whether, in the light of that one idea, all the old-fashioned Christian ideas about the relations of God to man—whether a Providence, Prayer, Inspiration, Revelation; the Incarnation, the Passion, and the final triumph, of the Son of God—whether all these, I say, do not begin to seem to you, not merely beautiful, not merely probable, but rational and logical and necessary moral consequences from the one idea of an Absolute and Eternal Goodness, the Living Parent of the Universe. And so I leave you to the Grace of God.’

So he spoke, standing here as I stand now, as on the banks of this great river of life. So he speaks to us still, standing on the farther bank of another vaster, deeper, darker river—the river of death. Whether he sees us or not, we know not; whether in that light into which we trust he has passed those strong impassioned words may have become weak and pale—how far, ‘when that which is perfect has come, that which is partial in them shall vanish away,’ like the half-formed thoughts and inarticulate utterances of a child—we know not; but this we cannot and we will not doubt, that as they were his last message to us on that last parting, so they contain in substance and spirit the message which he would have delivered to us down to his last moment on earth, and, if possible, beyond it. When the shadows of death were closing him round, still, we are told, the same beatific vision of that which alone makes the blessedness of heaven was before his failing sight—‘How beautiful,’ he said, ‘how beautiful is God.’

Stand fast, O my brethren, stand fast in that faith—in the faith that God is good, and that man, to be well-pleasing to God, must be good also. That faith which is indeed the ‘Good news of God’ to man, ‘that name of the Eternal,’ was to him ‘a strong tower, in which the righteous could take refuge and be safe’—‘the stronghold and the castle to which he would always resort,’ from which he derived whatever strength and force there was in his creed or in his life.

Stand ye fast in this faith, O wavering, perplexed, anxious souls, and you shall not be shaken by doubt, nor undermined by superstition. Stand fast in this faith, O sorrowing, suffering, bereaved friends, who feel that in the removal of those whom you have loved or admired the splendour of your life is dimmed, and you shall not be sorry as men without hope for those that sleep in Him who is Perfect Grace and Perfect Truth. Stand fast in this faith, and by it correct, enlarge, enlighten, strengthen whatever other faith you have.

And not only stand fast in it, but follow it onward whithersoever it leads you. ‘Be not only steadfast and unmovable, but be also abounding,’ overflowing in the ever-increasing work of the Lord which lies before us all, ‘forasmuch as you know and have seen in him that his labour was not in vain in the Lord.’

In his last journey in America, in answer to one who had wished him long life, he replied :—‘That is the last thing that I desire. It may be that, as one grows older, one acquires more and more the painful consciousness of the difference between what *ought* to

‘ be done and what *can* be done, and sits down more
‘ quietly when one gets on the wrong side of fifty, and
‘ lets others start up to do for us the things one cannot
‘ do for ourselves. But it is the highest pleasure that
‘ a man can have who has turned down the hill at last
‘ (and to his own exceeding comfort) to believe that
‘ younger spirits will rise up after him, and catch the
‘ lamp of truth, as in the old lamp-bearing race of
‘ Greece, out of his hand before it expires, and carry
‘ it on to the goal with swifter and more even feet.’

The lamp has fallen from that hand: it is for us,
for you, to hand it on, with increased light, to the
generations yet to come.

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